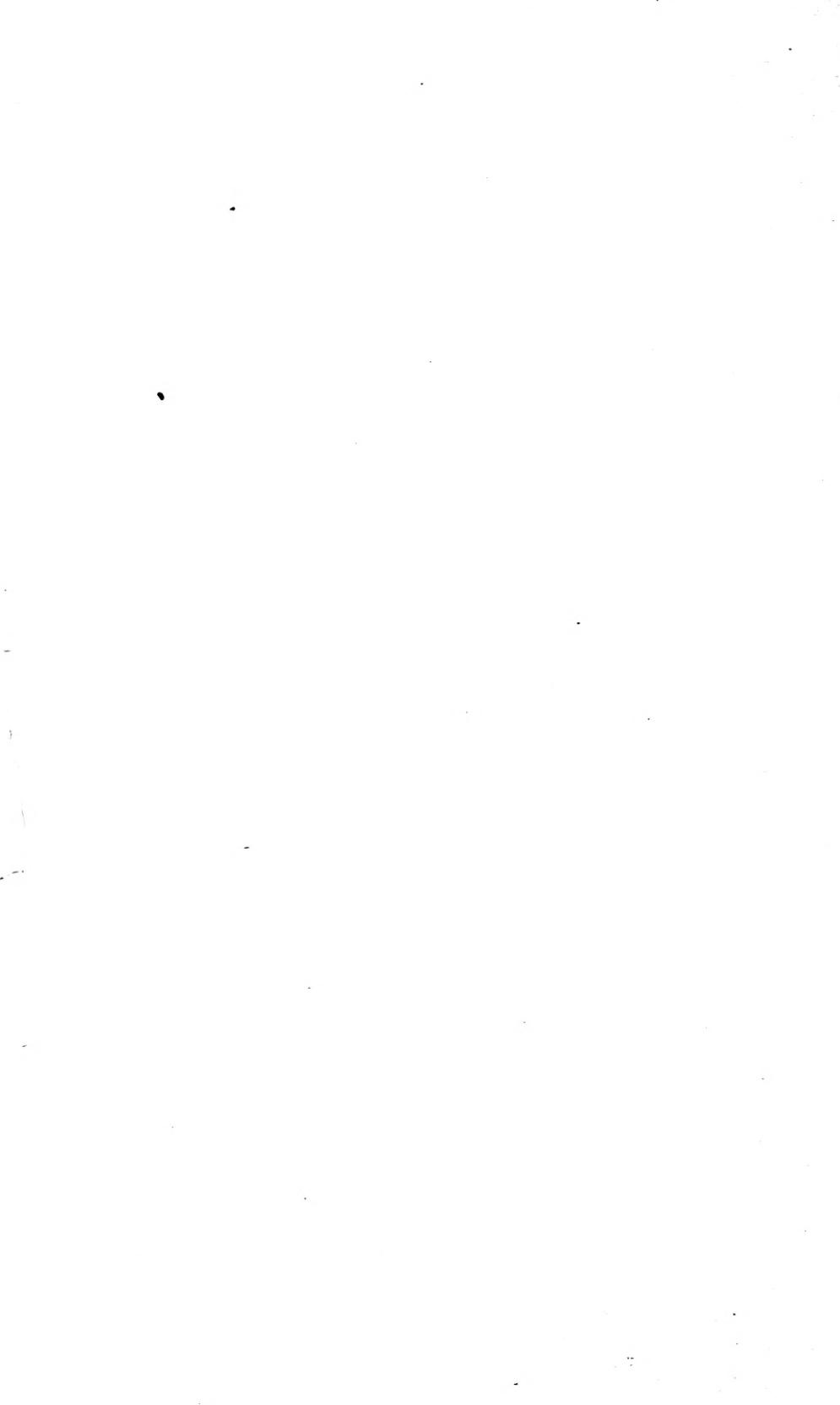


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A SIGHT OF CHRIST.

A Sermon

Preached at St. Margaret's Church, on Sunday Evening,
March 5th, 1899, by the

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Rector.

"Sir, we would see Jesus."—*St. John* xii., 22.

THE occasion was unique. "There were certain Greeks, of them which came up to worship at the Feast. These came then to Philip which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus."

Note first that the initiative was with them. They desired to see Him: He had not sought them. For His mission during His earthly life was not to them. We do not always sufficiently bear in mind how limited was the scope of our Lord's earthly ministry. He confined Himself, with a few exceptions, strictly to the Jews. He hardly ever stepped outside the narrow boundaries of the Holy Land, whose area is no larger than the county of Yorkshire or the principality of Wales. It was not meet, He said once to a woman that was a Greek, "to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." He was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

And yet He was "the Son of Man"—the Man for all men. His ultimate purpose, as we saw this morning, was to weld all men into the unity of one.

He had not sought them: but now they had sought Him. In what spirit they had come, we are not told. But it was likely that they were serious men. Attracted probably by the beauty of the Old Testament scriptures, which had been trans-

lated into their tongue, they had learned to reverence the Supreme God of the Jewish people, and they had come up to worship Him in His great Temple at Jerusalem. And there they had heard of Jesus, the young Prophet from Galilee; of His wonderful deeds, of His no less wonderful words. They must by all means see Him and hear Him for themselves. Had he perchance a message which might reach even to them?

He does not refuse them an interview. He recognises the significance of their request; He feels the uniqueness of the moment. It is one of "the days of the Son of Man." It is a pledge and a prophecy of the future.

They shall see Him—and that not merely with their bodily eyes. He will open up to them more than a superficial view of Himself. He will let them look into His heart and His life.

He is near to the end. "The Feast" which had brought them to Jerusalem was, as it proved, the occasion of His Crucifixion. His Death was, in some sense at least, full in His view. He was facing, hour by hour, that which would seem, when it came, to his nearest disciples the very overthrow and failure of His whole mission. Not a shred of human support would be left to it. All the fabric that He had seemed to be building would come crashing down in a gigantic ruin. He Himself would be shamed, tortured, done to death.

He knew that He should go through it, and come out on the other side. But others could not grasp this, though He told them of it.

Out of the depth of what was in His own consciousness He speaks. He shews them Himself: He allows them to see Him.

His first words, as they met, were indeed such as must have been unintelligible to them. They were scarcely addressed to them, though they were spoken in their hearing. "The hour is come," He said, "that the Son of Man should be glorified." We can see, as we look back, something of what He must have meant.

Then He directly addresses them, in words which were perfectly simple, and which in after days must have echoed again and again in their souls. "Verily, verily, I say unto *you*, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." It was a parable; but the meaning was not far to seek. The isolated life, He declared, was a wasted life: the only fruitful life is the life that dies.

A single grain of wheat, shut up in a box, is wholly and utterly useless. You cannot make a loaf of it. It serves no purpose at all. It has grown and swelled and ripened into its present perfection, and the end of it all is that it is perfectly worthless by itself. Nature has wasted her forces: she has produced a valueless product: "it abideth alone."

But what "if it die"? if it surrender its perfectness to the disintegrating soil? if it be content to be buried and broken up and decomposed, trusting only to the germ of life which it contains? If it give its life away—"if it die"—then there is a glorious harvest of abundant reproduction. "If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

The lesson was not a difficult one to understand. It was taught, indeed, out of an inner consciousness which they could not penetrate. They could not know as yet how much of His own life He was shewing them. But His words were very simple, and part at least of His meaning was within their grasp. And lest by any chance they should miss it, He went on to make it absolutely clear. "He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

He has said no more. He has merely said over again what He had said before in a figure. The life loved is the life lost: the life rejected, so far as material and transitory interests go, is the life that is saved for the highest ends.

And He adds to this words which involve the most unhesitating claim. He assumes that they desire not merely to see Him, but to serve Him. And they are right in their desire: for to

serve Him is the highest at which they can aim. "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant be." They cannot know precisely whither He is going; but they must follow Him, and accept the consequences, whatever they may be. He has told them enough to let them see what sort of path He is likely to tread. He is going to put His own principle into practice. He is going to die, that in a thousand forms He may live. He that would serve Him, must follow Him: "it is enough that the servant be as his Master": "where I am, there shall My servant be." But the words are a promise in disguise: and He interprets them as such, when He adds: "If any man serve Me, him will My Father honour."

We need not pursue the conversation further. It becomes more purely personal to Himself, and then He turns from Himself to speak to His Father.

We hear no more of "the Grecks" who desired to "see Jesus." They pass from our view as completely as the Wise Men from the East who came to the Nativity. But like them they were representative of the great outside world which is destined to come to the feet of the Christ. More especially, they represented the Western world: and so they represented ourselves. And the revelation of Himself, which He gave to them, in the revelation which we need to-day. His words to them are His message to ourselves.

As they pass from us, we can follow them a little way in our thoughts. They had seen Jesus. They had not been disappointed in their quest: nay, they had seen Him in a fuller sense than they had anticipated. He had told them the law of the highest life; He had made them feel that it was the law of His own life.

It was certainly very remarkable—we can almost hear them say, as they ponder His words one with another—it was certainly very remarkable. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." That must mean that a life that is

lived by and for itself, however perfect and complete and harmonious it may seem, is a life that is barren and unprofitable. "Except it die, it abideth alone: but, if it die—if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." A paradox truly: but the perpetual paradox of Nature. We see it in the natural world. He declares that it holds also in the spiritual world. "He that loveth His life, loseth it: but he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." That is the same thing in other words. But what a philosophy of life! Surrender is the gate of success: death is the portal of life.

"Never man spake like this man!" And then He seemed to assume that we came because we wanted to be His servants. He laid His strong hand so gently on our shoulders, and claimed us as His own. "If any man serve *Me*, let Him follow *Me*: and where I am there shall My servant be." And what a universality in His claims! Who need be excluded from His service, and from the reward that follows it? "If *any man* serve *Me*, him will the Father honour." The All-Father is our Father too: and this is the path by which we may find Him. Truly this is "the Way and the Truth and the Life."

This morning I endeavoured in my first words to you to trace the broad purpose of the life of Christ, as it is indicated in the Gospels. He came to draw all men to Himself: He came "that they all might be one." He Himself was revealed as the new foundation upon which the Unity of Mankind was to be built up. He gathered a few souls together, to be one with Him even as He was one with the Father, and to carry on His work of uniting men by the formation of a visible society, which should expand and expand till it included the whole human race.

The conception is a large and a mysterious one; and to some of you it might seem to be remote from our common life, to be in curious contradiction with the most obvious facts, and to be little helpful to those who have after all to live in a very imperfect world. I do not believe that it need be so. Indeed I think

that our daily life often suffers from the littleness and poverty of our ideals. Practical people as we are, we are content to aim at that which is less than the highest: and, as we generally find that we hit a good deal lower than our aim in any case, the consequence is that we fall very far short of what we might reach if we had courage to aim higher. These large thoughts do us good: they open our hearts, they lift us nearer to God. They supply us with a noble motive; they encourage us with a splendid hope.

But, lest we should even seem to lose ourselves in vagueness and mystery, I have chosen to-night a very personal subject—the relation of the individual life to the great Purpose of God. I have asked you to be present, as it were, at an interview between Jesus Christ and certain earnest souls who wanted to see Him. We have heard how He talked with them; how He opened up His own life's secret in their presence; how He shewed them the method—the very practical method—by which He sought to make His great ideal an actual reality. We have heard Him saying that a life must die, if it is to rise to all that it is meant to be: that, as in the natural world, so in the spiritual world, a life can reproduce itself over and over again, if only it is content to die. We have heard Him go on so simply to assume that those who have once seen Him will want to serve Him: that those who have once grasped His method, will wish to follow it out in their own lives. We have almost felt His invisible Hand laid upon our own shoulders, claiming us from this night and for ever to be His servants.

We cannot see Him with our own outward eyes, as those Greeks saw Him. We cannot follow in His actual footsteps. We sometimes fancy perhaps that, if we shut our eyes tightly, we might call up a vision of Him standing before us, and beckoning to us to come after Him; and we think that that would indeed be a crisis in our lives, and that then we should be His for evermore.

Perhaps it may be so for some of us who have emotional natures : but for many of us nothing of the sort will come : we should even mistrust ourselves if it did.

Nay, we cannot thus know " Christ after the flesh." But we can follow Him none the less. We can follow Him with our mind : we can understand His method, we can recognise His aim. And we can follow Him with our will : we can determine to choose His aim as our aim, and we can determine to try to put His method into practice.

With our mind and our will we can love Him, and the rest—the emotional love—may wait. That will come as the crown of all in God's own time and way. He was very clear and practical Himself about this matter.

Listen to Him once again : " He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." Let us thank Him for saying that : it sweeps away so many difficulties. " And he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." That will awaken, be sure of it, the response of love even in your cold heart.

And once again : " If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him ; and we will come unto Him, and make our abode with Him."

" Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Even so, " abide with us."

